



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Inflammation of the air passages (trachea; bronchi; bronchioles) of the lungs. Acute bronchitis is of sudden onset and short duration (chronic bronchitis is persistent over a long period and recurring over several years).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Cough that produces little or no sputum initially, but does later on.
- Low fever (usually less than 101° F or 38.3° C).
- Burning chest discomfort or feeling of pressure behind the breastbone.
- Wheezing or uncomfortable breathing (sometimes).

CAUSES

- Infection from one of many respiratory viruses. Most cases of acute bronchitis begin with a cold virus in the nose and throat that spreads to the airways. A secondary bacterial infection is common.
- Lung inflammation from breathing air that contains irritants, such as chemical fumes (ammonia), acid fumes, dust or smoke.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- Smoking.
- Cold, humid weather.
- Poor nutrition.
- Recent illness that has lowered resistance.
- Areas with high atmospheric pollution.
- Elderly and very young age groups.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid close contact with persons who have bronchitis.
- Don't smoke.
- If you work with chemicals, dust or other lung irritants, wear an appropriate face mask.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable with treatment in 1 week. Cases with complications are usually curable in 2 weeks with medication.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Bacterial lung infection (various kinds of pneumonia).
- Chronic bronchitis from recurrent episodes of acute bronchitis.
- Cough may persist for several weeks after initial improvement.
- Pleurisy (inflammation of the lining of the lungs) (rare).



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnosis is usually based on the symptoms displayed, but a sputum culture may be done to check for bacterial infection.
- Treatment is directed toward relieving the symptoms, unless there are signs of secondary bacterial infection: green sputum, fever over 101° F or worsening symptoms.
- If you are a smoker, don't smoke during your illness. This delays recovery and makes complications more likely.
- Increase air moisture. Take frequent hot showers. Use a cool-mist, ultrasonic humidifier by your bed. Clean humidifier daily.
- Additional information available from the American Lung Association, 1740 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, (800) 586-4872.

MEDICATIONS

- For minor discomfort, you may use:
 - Acetaminophen to reduce fever.
- Non-prescription cough suppressants. Use only if your cough is non-productive (without sputum). It may be dangerous to stop a cough entirely as this traps excess mucus and irritants in bronchial tubes, leading to pneumonia and poor oxygen exchange in the lungs.
- Other drugs that may be prescribed:
 - Antibiotics to fight bacterial infections.
 - Expectorants to thin mucus so it can be coughed up more easily.
 - Cough suppressants.

ACTIVITY

Rest in bed until temperature returns to normal. Then resume normal activity gradually as symptoms improve.

DIET

No special diet. Drink at least 8 to 10 glasses of fluid each day to help thin mucus secretions so they can be coughed up more easily.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of bronchitis.
- The following occur during the illness:
 - High fever and chills.
 - Chest pain.
 - Thickened, discolored or blood-streaked sputum.
 - Shortness of breath, even when the body is at rest.
 - Vomiting.